

Home, Sweet Home (1914)

D.W. Griffith (1875–1948)

OVERVIEW

Director D.W. Griffith (1875-1948) earned his place in film history as a Hollywood pioneer. Including all of his shorts and projects, Griffith produced nearly 500 films, many of which have been lost. His 1914 *Judith of Bethulia* was one of the first feature films produced in the United States, and many know him from his controversial 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*. Only three of his films include recorded sound. Many film and editing techniques that are now commonplace were first used by Griffith in the early 1900s. Despite his many accolades and firsts, D.W. Griffith remains widely criticized; *The Birth of a Nation*, for example, is often said to be one of the key factors in the Ku Klux Klan's revival in the interwar period.

Film *Home, Sweet Home* (1914) was another experiment by Griffith into the feature format. This biographical drama starred a number of soon-to-be silent film stars including Herry B. Walthall, Josephine Crowell, and the Gish sisters. What seems like a short film today was a 6 reel endeavor broken into chapters and spaced out between reel-changing periods. The story follows several groups of people separated by time and space but united by the ever-popular song *Home! Sweet Home!* by John Howard Payne.

Background Griffith continued his tradition of creating Christian moral plays as features in *Home, Sweet Home*. In the first chapter, we watch John Howard Payne forsake and then return to his Christian moral ways before writing the age-old song and then dying far from home. The song takes over as the central character, weaving its way into the lives and struggles of those throughout the following years. The epilogue shows a man repent before death before being taken up to heaven by an angel. In this sequence, Griffith used a number of experimental camera and film development tricks to make the woman appear as a floating specter, shrouded in light. Prints of the film exist in the holdings of the Cohen Media Group, the EmGee Film Library, and several other private film collections.

Lyrics

Home! Sweet Home! by John Howard Payne.

*Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there
Which seek thro' the world, is ne'er met elsewhere
Home! Home!
Sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home
There's no place like home!*

*An exile from home splendor dazzles in vain
Oh give me my lowly thatched cottage again
The birds singing gaily that came at my call
And gave me the peace of mind dearer than all
Home, home, sweet, sweet home
There's no place like home, there's no place like home!*

CHARACTERS

PART I

John Howard Payne – American Actor, Poet, and Playwright of the early 1800s

Payne's Mother – Payne's Mother

Payne's Sweetheart – The woman Payne loved

Sister of Payne's Sweetheart – Another woman close to Payne

The Worldly Woman – A seductress from the city

PART II

Apple Pie Mary – A woman who runs the saloon in a gold rush boom town

Mary's Father – The owner of the saloon

The Easterner, Robert Winthrop – A young man hoping to strike it rich who falls in love with Mary

The Fiancée – A woman from out East who is betrothed to Robert

PART III

The Mother – A woman living in a seaside town with her two sons

The Mother's Sons – Two fishermen who hate each other.

The Dull Lad – A disabled boy who wants to emulate the sheriff

The sheriff – A trusted law officer

PART IV

The Husband – A man

The Wife – A woman

The Tempter – A man who lusts after the wife

EPILOGUE

Sinner – A man who repents

Angel – An angel

The Masters – Representations of sinful temptations

SYNOPSIS

Home, Sweet Home is an experiment in the feature film style, meaning it doesn't quite look like what we would expect of a film today. It resembles a stage play with its different parts and multiple stories. What binds it together as a feature is John Howard Payne's song *Home! Sweet Home!* a thematic element that turns this collection of scenes into a moral tale.

In the first part, we see a dramatization of the life and works of John Howard Payne. As a young man, he forsakes his home to travel to the city, gaining experience in "worldly" delights and culture. After a visit from his mother and his sweetheart, he promises to give up worldly culture. The segment ends with his death abroad, dreaming of home and his sweetheart.

The second part takes place in Gold Rush era California. Apple Pie Mary sets her sights on a cultured young man from out East, Robert, and eventually, he promises to marry her. Things change when he has to go back East: His parents have promised his hand in marriage to another, richer woman. Robert travels back West to show his family his stake and finds the "worldly" culture of the Easterners at odds with the "moral" culture out West. Seeking to please his peers, he forsakes Mary, but on the trip home, he changes his mind and borrows a horse to race home to marry Mary.

The third part reenacts the story of Cain and Abel in a more modern setting: Two brothers are at each other's throats. An argument about money pushes one over the edge, and he attempts to murder his brother. The dull lad overhears the fighting and rushes off to find the sheriff, but the lawman arrives too late. The brothers have killed each other, one out of greed and the other out of vengeance. Their mother attempts suicide, but the dull lad promises to be her new son, diffusing the situation and giving the boy a new home.

The fourth part is a simple love story about an unfaithful bride. Through the power of Home! Sweet Home!, she can resist the temptation of another man.

The epilogue shows us a short vision of Christian redemption, where, in order to save his soul from hell, a man repents and is taken to heaven by an angel.

Throughout each of these parts, the song *Home! Sweet Home!* is played by a musician or the lyrics are applicable to the themes of the story. The lyrics are put on screen during the epilogue to cement their religious moral themes.

SCENES

PART I

Title Cards – A series of title cards explains the preceding film. First, we see “Suggested by the life of JOHN HOWARD PAYNE and his immortal song, ‘HOME, SWEET HOME’.” The second card explains, “Not biographical but photo-dramatic and allegorical, and might apply to the lives and works of many men of genius, whose failings in private life have been outweighed by their great gifts to humanity.” A third card continues, “Payne, actor, poet, dramatist, critic, a world wanderer, he, who had never know a home since early boyhood, amid the bitterness of adversity conceived this song.”



Preparing to leave his country home – The scene opens on a rising window. It opens like the curtain on a stage to reveal a modest parlor where a woman sits in a rocking chair. She rises to meet her son, John Howard Payne, when he enters. The scene fades to black, and a title card introduces Payne's sweetheart and her sister. The two young women exit a house and sit on a bench in the garden, chatting. The scene jumps back to Payne embracing his mother, saying one last farewell. He exits the house, bag in hand, and takes one final look at his childhood home. Inside the house, Mrs. Payne says a prayer for her son.



A sweetheart's promise- Payne appears in the garden. He and his sweetheart move to one side to speak in relative private, the sweetheart's sister eavesdropping from the bench. “Till the end of the world and afterward, I shall wait for you,” Payne's sweetheart says through a title card. Payne kisses his sweetheart on the temple, and the sweetheart's sister covers her mouth in shock. Payne leaves after saying goodbye to both women. With him gone, the sisters share a tender embrace, the younger comforting the elder sister about her beloved leaving. “It will be happiness to wait for him,” a title card reads. Payne's sweetheart paces around inside, showing us her impatience with her separation from Payne.



Seeking employment – Actors practice their oration in the back hall of a theater. Payne enters and crosses to the theater master where he has a brief conversation. After a moment, Payne clears his throat and begins orating to the theater master. “He secures a trial” a title card says before Payne finishes his tryout. The theater master hands him a piece of paper and tells him to leave. Payne smiles and takes the paper before exiting the way he entered. The news of Payne's employment gets mixed reactions back home: His sweetheart reacts excitedly, hugging his mother, but Payne's mother shakes her head in disapproval of his worldly profession.



An unexpected visit – In Payne's lodgings in the city, we see his mother and his sweetheart enter. They look around, touching some of his tchotchkes. His mother is particularly pleased to see a heavy, ornate copy of the bible sitting on a table. Payne's sweetheart sees him in the street and prepares to surprise him. The women move into the bedroom before Payne enters with a bunch of well-dressed but drunken men. The women listen from the bedroom in disapproval as the men continue drinking and joking loudly in the parlor. "Such horrid language," says Payne's mother. His sweetheart tries to console her, saying, "They do but rehearse their parts." Eventually the other men leave when a group of women enter and drag them back outside. Payne stumbles around drunkenly before finally finding a chair and promptly falling asleep. Payne's mother and sweetheart exit his bedroom and mourn his unchristian behavior.



His promise – The next morning, Payne stands beside his mother who appears to be scolding and reasoning with him about his drinking and carousing. His sweetheart appears with a flower in her hand. She clasps her hands in prayer as Payne says something to his mother. Payne's sweetheart places the flower in his outstretched hand and he smiles, clutching it gently and saying something to her. His mother leaves quickly, but his sweetheart stays for a moment, motioning to her heart with one hand. Payne repeats the motion with the flower in his hand, and she leaves. After the women leave, Payne clasps his hands and looks to the sky, saying a prayer. He seems intent on changing his ways.



Worldly woman- A title card reads, "I will await thee, my dear boy." The scene opens on Payne's sweetheart working in a kitchen. She smiles to herself, thinking of Payne. Another title card introduces "The Worldly Woman" before a woman enters Payne's lodgings while he reads a script. He is unaware of her, and she seems to plot something before getting his attention. Payne seems entranced by the woman and moves to embrace and kiss her. She shakes him off, scolding him. Before moving around flirtily. They embrace again, but she tauntingly keeps her lips just out of reach from a kiss. Back home, Payne's sweetheart smiles to herself with a cup of tea, apparently thinking of Payne.



The writing of the song – A group of men dismisses Payne before leaving his accommodations one by one. Soon, the worldly woman enters and says something to Payne before dismissing him and leaving like the men. Lost in thought, Payne sits down at a table and thinks of home, the scene changing to his sweetheart once again to show us his thoughts. Struck with inspiration, Payne begins writing. The scene fades in and out (It's not clear whether this is a directorial choice or damage to the surviving reels). Payne's thoughts turn to home again, and we see a glimpse of his mother and sweetheart seated on the steps of his childhood home. Finally finished writing, Payne lifts the page to the nearby candle to read. The lyrics to the song *Home! Sweet Home!* appear on the screen [see above]. Thinking the verse too simplistic, Payne begins to rip the paper, but he stops. He smiles and the scene fades out.



Evil news of her boy – Back home, Payne's mother hastily opens a letter and is shocked to read something. Apparently mourning, she stumbles to the rocking chair where she falls to her knees, sobbing. "His death in a foreign land" a title card reads before the scene opens on Payne being attended to by two men in a semblance of traditional Arabic dress. He leans back on a divan and closes his eyes, clutching a copy of his song. "The true and the false alike went into equal silence," says a title card before the scene opens on Payne's sweetheart, lying dead somewhere (the background is ambiguous.)



PART II

A fortune-seeking youth – After a series of title cards introducing the characters and their players, The scene opens on the interior of a saloon where Apple Pie Mary works. Soon, a young man, Robert, dressed in a smart suit enters and tries to get Mary's attention. Failing, he bangs a cup on the bar. Mary and her father look at Robert with strange expressions before he politely asks for service. As he speaks, Mary grows more interested in him. After serving Robert coffee and food, she ducks under the counter to undo her rudimentary curlers. Partway through the process, Robert interrupts her, asking for a spoon. Mary comically shines one of the spoons before handing it to Robert.



Proposal – Sometime later, we see Mary working at the bar. Robert rushes in, now dressed like a prospector. He says something and Mary responds, pointing to the object on the counter between them. Robert mimes "For me?" before Mary packs it away for him. Suddenly, Robert leans over the counter, asking, "Will you marry me?" Mary reacts coldly for a moment, but she changes her mind, stretching her arms out to him. Robert clutches her, both of them laughing happily. Offended by the public display of affection, Mary's father pounds his cane on the floor until they stop. Robert says something, miming with his hands that he has to go, but that he will come back. He leaves, and Mary follows before a title card appears reading, "Home, Sweet Home! Every time I hear it, I'll think of you."



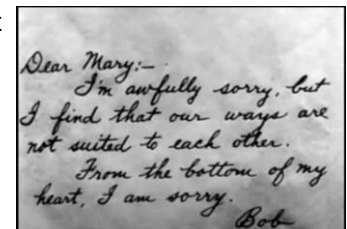
Distant relatives – Somewhere in the boom town, a man gets Robert's attention and points into a nearby building. Several people dressed in a wealthy Eastern style emerge and Robert greets them with surprise. They comment on his clothing and hand him a letter which he reads. A title card says, "Obliged to go East on a short visit." Robert rushes into Mary's home and shows her the letter. Understanding that he must leave, Mary retrieves something from a nearby table and hands it to him, saying, "I got no picture to give you, but this Christmas card looks like me." Robert tucks it into his breast pocket with a smile before giving her a gift in exchange: "You can keep my glasses." She takes them and they kiss. Robert barely makes it to the stagecoach before the driver whips the horses and it rolls away.



Return on a business trip – Robert, dressed richly, walks toward the saloon. Inside, Mary entertains a pair of rowdy prospectors. Robert mistakes her friendliness with affection and thinks she's forgotten him. Robert's family enters the shot, and he steers them away from the saloon. Afterward, a title card appears: "Contrast between Mary and his Eastern friends causes disillusionment." The Easterners leave and Robert follows, missing the scene inside when Mary slaps one of the prospectors when he grabs her hand. Outside the stagecoach office, Robert speaks to the Eastern woman with him before another title card appears, saying, "Marriage to the Eastern girl means position and fortune."



Letter – Outside a building somewhere in the boom town, a man recognizes Robert and rushes off to tell Mary. Thinking he's just some sort of pest, Mary tells him to go away, but the man insists that she listen and tells her of Robert's arrival. Neither understanding that Robert is leaving, not arriving, Mary begins to prepare to rush and meet him at the stagecoach office. At the same time, however, Robert is preparing to board the stagecoach. Another man appears outside the saloon with a letter for Mary. It reads, "Dear Mary:- I'm awfully sorry, but I find that our ways are not suited to each other. From the bottom of my heart, I am sorry. Bob." Looking dejected, Mary wanders back into the saloon before the scene fades to black.



Old familiar song – The stagecoach rushes along the road until it stops to change horses at a way station. There, Robert hears *Home! Sweet Home!* Played on a squeezebox and he thinks of Mary. At the saloon, Mary stands outside, looking Eastward. Suddenly filled with vigor, Robert throws his cane on the ground and demands a nearby man give him a horse. His friends from back East all wonder what he is doing, but nothing they say can stop him. Robert mounts the horse and gallops off toward the boom town.



Homecoming – Tossing and turning in her sleep, Mary falls to the floor in her bedroom. She cries for a moment before pushing herself beneath her bed. Outside, Robert pulls on the horses' reins and jumps off, running into Mary's home. He's frightened not to find her there and paces around the room. Mary peeks out meekly from beneath the bed and Robert spots her. She's wearing his glasses. She reaches up and hands him the letter. Robert responds by snatching it and throwing it to the floor. Mary responds with anger, but she softens as Robert explains himself. They hug and kiss as the scene fades to black.



Four years later – Some title cards with some of the lyrics of *Home! Sweet Home!* appear before the scene opens on Mary and Robert playing with their children in a new home. Mary's father watches in the background, smoking on his pipe. A baby in a cradle smiles while Mary shakes a rattle and Robert gently roughhouses with his son. Mary and Robert kiss before the scene fades out.



PART III

The Dull Lad – After a series of title cards introducing the story, some of the characters, and players, The scene opens on a fisherman's hut. Inside, an older woman mends nets while two men stare hatefully at one another. A young man enters and says something to one of the men. The man grimaces and shoves him in response. Smirking, the other man pulls a coin out of his pocket and hands it to the young man. The boy smiles and thanks him before shooting the other man a sour look. A title card reads "The dull lad and the sheriff whom he idolizes." On a cliff overlooking the sea, the young man from before, the dull lad, smiles at the sheriff who rides a pony. They talk about the horse before the sheriff gallops off.



Hateful brothers – Back at the fisherman's hut, the older woman, a mother, talks to the men, two brothers, before telling them to get to work. They smile and pat each other's back like friends, but once the door closes outside, they make hateful faces at one another and throw threatening gestures. Somewhere in the woods by the ocean, the elder brother meets a man. They chat for a while, unaware that the younger brother is watching them from behind the trees. He watches his brother get a large stack of coins from the other man. The younger approaches his brother and asks for some money, but the elder simply pockets his coins and then walks away. The younger brother pulls out a flask and drinks heavily, stalking his brother through the woods.



Empty home – Jealousy blooms when the younger brother watches the older brother give a coin to a homeless man. He thinks of killing him by bludgeoning him, but thinks twice, rushing off toward their home. The dull lad watches him from a nearby bush, unobserved. The mother leaves her home, and the younger brother arrives soon thereafter. He enters, and the dull lad follows, spying on him through the window. The younger brother pulls a pistol from a shelf and assures it is loaded before saying, "I'll finish him to-day." He then mimes using the gun, practicing what he'll do to his brother. The dull lad rushes off, thinking of the sheriff before running to find him,



stealing a horse to do so. Eventually, the elder brother finishes his work and returns home. He stops outside the house to pet the dog. Somewhere along the shore, the dim lad rides.

Demand for money – Inside the house, the younger brother levels the pistol at the door while outside the elder brother plays with the dog. Somewhere nearby, the dull lad spots the Sheriff's horse and calls for him. After a long while, the elder brother finally enters the house. The younger brother holds him up using the pistol, and a long struggle breaks out for the gun.



Fratricide – As the brothers fight, the sheriff and the dull lad race back to the home, pushing their horses as hard as they can. Eventually, the younger brother pushes the older brother away and grabs the gun. The elder brother begs for mercy while outside, a troubadour plays a guitar. The younger brother laughs manically and shoots his brother. He celebrates for a moment before he hears the sheriff and the dull lad riding up. Quickly, the younger brother takes the coins from his brother's pocket, dropping the pistol. The elder brother weakly grabs the pistol and rolls over, shooting his brother with his last ounce of life before falling limp. As the younger brother falls to the floor, the sheriff and the dull lad enter the home.



Grief-stricken mother – The sheriff and the dull lad are stricken with shock over finding the brothers dead. Soon, the mother enters and shares in their shock. The dull lad shows her the pistol, and she drops to the floor, trying to rouse her boys. She stumbles outside, pushing the men away from her before grabbing a knife and holding it aloft, pointing it at her chest. The troubadour walks by, singing *Home! Sweet Home!* and this makes the mother pause for a moment, long enough for the dull lad to get the knife away from her. Weeping, the mother falls to the porch. In comforting her, we learn through a title card that the dull lad offers to be her new son, and this keeps her from wanting to end her life.



PART IV

The marriage of roses and lilies – The scene opens on a bride and groom standing among roses and lilies, practicing for their wedding. The bride lowers her veil, looking forlorn while the groom speaks. Somewhere in the same building, a young man prepares for the wedding. He notices a violin nearby and picks it up and begins to play *Home! Sweet Home!*. The bride and groom notice the song, and the bride moves to investigate. When she comes back, the groom holds her hands and says, "This day we shall always remember." In the other room, a man enters and chastises the boy for playing the violin.



Two years later – A title card appears saying, "Two years later – The husband to be away at the club." The husband bites the end off of a cigar and looks for his wife, shaking his head when he can't find her. She wanders into the room, looking glum, and they share a few words before kissing goodbye. The husband lights his cigar and collects his things before leaving while the wife wanders aimlessly around their parlor. A title card reads "A visitor of evil" before introducing the tempter. A well-dressed man with a top hat enters the home and makes his way into the parlor. The wife greets him fondly, holding out her hand which he takes. They talk for a while, standing awfully close to one another.



The husband returns – The husband enters the front room and crosses to the parlor door, but, looking at his cigar, he decides to finish it before going inside as a courtesy to his wife. In the parlor, the tempter pushes himself closer to the wife, and she pushes him away gently, smiling. Suddenly, the tempter grabs the wife's hands and says something to her emphatically. Out in the front room, the husband settles into a chair for a quick nap. The tempter moves in close to the wife once more and she pushes him away.



Moment of weakness – A title card appears saying, “Across the way.” A maid walks into a room where a violinist plays. Back in the parlor, the tempter takes the wife’s hand again, kissing it in farewell as he backs out of the room. He and the wife are startled to find the husband sleeping in a chair just outside the door. The tempter moves to grab his hat and coat when the maid across the way asks the violinist to play “the old ballad.” He plays *Home! Sweet Home!* and the wife hears it, remembering her wedding day and hearing the tune. The tempter comes back, hoping for a kiss, and she shoos him away, simply pointing to her husband. The tempter gone, she sits on the arm of her husband’s chair and rouses him. They share a tender moment as across the way, the maid shuns the violinist’s kiss.



Ten years later – The husband and wife, now older, sit with their son and daughter, reading a book. Another daughter enters the shot and kneels in prayer. The others follow suit and show reverence. Afterward, she climbs into her mother’s chair and hugs and kisses her. The scene fades to black while the family all crowds together for a group hug.



Epilogue – This scene is a bit experimental and vague. It seems to be depicting Payne being saved by the spirit of his sweetheart, but it is also open to interpretation. The scene opens with a title card: “And so, for countless services like these shall not his faults be forgiven?” Another appears: “The vain fight to rise from the pit of evil.” A group of people stand in a smoking pit. Another title card introduces Masters Carnality, Brutality, and Worldly before a close-up shot of the figures in the pit. “I will await thee, my dear boy,” a title card reads before a shot of the sky takes the screen. Slowly, an angelic figure fades in, floating in the sky and shrouded in light. She floats closer to the screen, her long, trailing robe fluttering like wings. Two of the masters pull one of the figures back into the pit when he begins walking toward the angel. She fades away as do the masters holding the man back. He smiles, raising his hands to the sky before being whisked away to heaven by angels.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Part I

John Howard Payne – The poet and writer of the early 1800s and composer of the song *Home! Sweet Home!*. Payne plays a smaller part in the film than his song, so we don’t have much of a chance to learn about him. He is in love with an unnamed woman, and thoughts of her while separated spur him to write the verse.

Dissatisfied – Throughout this segment of the film, we see Payne’s dissatisfaction arise several times. Dissatisfied with his lot in life at home, he leaves, never to return. When he faces the judgment of his mother, we see dissatisfaction with himself emerge that Payne addresses with prayer and a desire to change. Unhappy with his lonesomeness while separated from his sweetheart, he is tempted by the worldly woman. It’s dissatisfaction with his worldly friends and the worldly woman that led him to write the song *Home! Sweet Home!* after being betrayed and dismissed by all of them after exiting debtor’s prison. We see Payne’s final dissatisfaction before his death: Unable to return home to see his beloved and his mother, he clutches the song which reminds him of them.

Payne’s Sweetheart – An unnamed woman who hopes to marry Payne upon his return home. She has a sister and is close to Payne’s mother. Her spirit helps to guide Payne out of hell after their deaths.

Loyal – We don’t see much of Payne’s sweetheart, but we do quickly learn that she is very loyal. “I will wait for thee, my dear boy” is the first line spoken by a character in the film, and she says it when Payne comes to say goodbye. When she and Payne’s mother go to visit him, Payne’s sweetheart speaks in his defense when his mother is offended by his friend’s language. When confronting Payne about his worldly excesses, his sweetheart gives him a flower, symbolizing her forgiveness and desire to be with him. As if tied together by fate, she even dies near to the same time Payne does, helping to guide him to heaven in the afterlife during the epilogue.

Part II

Apple Pie Mary – Mary is a simple woman working in her father's saloon in a Gold Rush boom town. She falls in love with Robert who promises to marry her. Eventually rejected, she falls into a deep depression.

Forgiving – This trait comes up a couple of times in this short story. Her initial forgiveness of Robert startling her by banging a cup leads to her initial attraction to the young man. When Robert betrays her, she falls into deep despair, but with a simple, heartfelt apology, Robert is able to win back her heart.

Lively – Apple Pie Mary is portrayed as rougher and less cultured than the Eastern women Robert knows. She carouses with her patrons in the saloon and is unafraid to strike them if they go too far. Unlike the demure women from the East, Mary actively pursues what she wants, following Robert when he leaves and telling Robert what is on her mind when he returns after his betrayal.

Robert Winthrop – Robert is a young man from out East. While working as a prospector, he falls in love with Apple Pie Mary and promises to wed her. A visit back East, however, makes him doubt his choice.

Adventurous – Robert is much more adventurous than his other Eastern counterparts. He enters the saloon and bangs a cup on the table with little hesitation. Robert also adopts the local dress while working as a prospector, something his Eastern relatives mock. While deciding whether he should go through with the marriage his parents have arranged, he brings his friends out West to show them where he's been having his adventures. When he hears *Home! Sweet Home!*, Robert realizes his mistake and takes a man's horse to race home to Mary, an action that shocks his Eastern friends.

Part III

The Hateful Brothers – These brothers are a more modern representation of Cain and Abel. Employed as fishermen, one brother works hard and earns a lot of money while the other is lazy and covets his brother's wages. This leads the younger brother to kill his elder brother, but the elder brother manages to shoot his brother before his death.

Angry – These boys are mad at each other. It's the clearest thing portrayed in this story. They pull hateful faces, sneer, and make threatening hand gestures at one another long before the first thought of murder crosses their minds. The typical overacting of silent film really helps to make this trait clear for both of them. While one is so mad he's driven to commit fratricide, the other seems somewhat less unstable, and he is often seen talking and working with others. This comparative goodness makes the other brother even more upset as he cannot live up to his brother's example. In their final confrontation, we see the older brother become incredibly angry with his younger brother for even thinking to attempt hurting him, and this lasts through his last breath when he manages to get the gun and shoot his brother in return. Anger leads to both their deaths and nearly results in their mother's suicide.

The Dull Lad – A mentally disabled young man who lives near the hateful brothers. He idolizes the local sheriff and attempts to be friendly with the brothers. When he sees the younger brother plotting a murder, he steals a horse and rides to find the sheriff.

Dutiful – The dull lad, seeking to emulate his idolized sheriff, is very dutiful. When he sees the younger brother plotting murder, he is driven to break the law in an attempt to stop him, stealing a horse. While the dull lad does find the sheriff, they return too late to stop the tragedy. Prompted by duty, he stops the mother from killing herself and offers himself as a surrogate son, giving her a new reason to live.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Religion *Home, Sweet Home* is first and foremost a Christian moral tale. One of the segments is simply a retelling of the biblical tale of Cain and Abel. The film pushes an idealized American protestant idea of family and home life. Many of the characters' struggles revolve around Christian ideals of piety and morality, posing the "worldly" people as the villains while those who shun drink and premarital relations are held up as the heroes of the story. There is a moment in the first chapter when Payne is dying where two men in some semblance of Arabic dress forsake his comfort in his last moments to ensure their own, turning the fan away from the dying man and towards one of his Arab servants. Through moments like these, Griffith wishes to show his faith not only as correct but superior, a theme which he continues from *Judith of Bethulia*, a story of a Jewish settlement under siege by the Assyrian army. While there, it is veiled in a historical retelling and focused on uplifting the power and legitimacy of the same god, in *Home, Sweet Home*, it is overtly propagandizing the superiority of the conservative protestant lifestyle as opposed to the flawed "worldly" existence of those living in the city or of other cultures and faiths.

Illustrative Moment The religious themes in *Home, Sweet Home* are most clear in the epilogue. Here, we see a depiction of a soul fleeing hell, a very American protestant idea. There is a vagueness about this sequence: Either we are seeing Payne saved from hell by the spirit of his sweetheart, or the same actors who play both characters play a damned soul and an angel respectively. This final scene is vague on purpose, allowing the viewer to see themselves or a loved one finding this salvation from the pits of hell. Using the power of love and faith to throw off the chains of the sinful masters, the damned soul is able to ascend to heaven. The idea of redemption upon death, a form of "coming to God," is an invention of American protestant belief that only became widely popular years after Payne's death. In this way, Griffith seeks to "claim" Payne for his "superior" faith with a method still used by a number of American Protestant offshoots such as the Mormon Church.



JUSTICE

Crime There is only one obvious crime committed in *Home, Sweet Home*, that of fratricide. In a retelling of Cain and Abel, Griffith seeks to show the senselessness of greed and violence. This scene also highlights the limits of justice: While the law is informed of the misdeeds of the younger brother, the sheriff is too late to stop the crime from happening and all he can do is respond to the aftermath. This theme ties into the theme of religion as punishment for moral crimes is depicted in the epilogue by the damned living in hell.

Illustrative Moment The hateful brothers represent the senselessness of crime. Fueled by life-long rivalry and greed, the younger brother plots to kill his older brother for his wages. Unable to quickly subdue his brother, they begin to struggle for the gun, and while this takes some time, they eventually shoot one another. This causes their mother to attempt suicide in grief, highlighting the social and societal effects of such crimes.



RELATIONSHIP

Desire The idea of desire is presented as sinful throughout the film. Payne's "descent" into worldly life in the city causes tension with his mother, but still, he wishes to travel the world. After suffering through debtor's prison and once again when dying abroad, Payne regrets his desire to leave home. Robert's desire for wealth and influence almost costs him his love with Mary. A desire for money causes the younger brother to kill his elder brother over a pocketful of coins. The wife's temptation for another man is based purely on sexual desire, a capital sin in chaste conservative protestant belief. This was a typical belief in early 1900s America: It was broadly believed by middle-class society that desire led to most crimes and suffering, and it led to the rise of teetotalism which would go on to create prohibition just a few years later.

Illustrative Moment The final story revolves around a simple tale of temptation and desire. The tempter seeks to abscond with the wife, and for a time, she seems liable to fall for his advances. However, when she hears *Home! Sweet Home!* played on a violin in a nearby apartment, she forgets her desire and remembers her love and devotion to her husband. In Griffith's worldview, desire is a sin in any form, but especially in a sexual context.



Betrayal Betrayal appears in a few forms throughout *Home, Sweet Home*. A desire to see the world causes Payne to betray the hopes of his mother and sweetheart when he eventually dies young abroad, having never visited home since leaving. Robert forsakes his love of Mary at first, but upon hearing *Home! Sweet Home!* played on an accordion, he changes his mind and rushes back to her. In a huge betrayal, brother kills brother in the third chapter. In the final chapter, a wife is tempted to betray her marital vows and run away with another man, but her devotion and strong memories keep her faithful. Each betrayal or chance for betrayal is desire, pushing Griffith's strong Protestant ideals.

Illustrative Moment When Robert mistakes Mary's friendliness with locals as an advance on another man, he compares her to his Eastern friends and relatives. Desiring not only love but power, he decides to forsake Mary and return home to the East. Robert writes a letter to Mary explaining and apologizing, and she reacts to it with despair. Unlike the next story where betrayal has deadly consequences, this story shows how love and forgiveness can lead to redemption when Robert changes his mind after hearing *Home! Sweet Home!* and thinking of Mary. Despite his betrayal, Mary accepts his apology and they create a happy family together.



Caring This theme appears in many small moments throughout the film. Care—or a lack thereof—drives all of the characters to either betray their loved ones or remain faithful. Each caring character acts in obviously caring ways, partially because of the lack of sound from the silent format. Those who care are seen as virtuous while all else is portrayed as sinful, even a desire to travel.

Illustrative Moment In a moment of deep despair, the mother attempts suicide after finding her sons dead. Showing deep care, the dull lad steps in and disarms her. In her sorrow, she turns to him for comfort, and he gives it to her. He even offers himself as a surrogate son, not fully understanding what has happened, but the offer is well-accepted by the mother, who embraces him and accepts him as her own.



Marriage Marriage is a central focus of *Home, Sweet Home*. The stories with happy endings both revolve around happy marriages. Robert and Mary and then the husband and wife are both shown with their happy families years after the completion of their individual storylines. A missed chance for marriage makes Payne's story all the more tragic, as his sweetheart remained faithful to him even after his death. Marriage is held up as the greatest goal a person could have, a theme repeated throughout *Home, Sweet Home*. Everything that distracts from it is seen as sinful and leads to the downfalls or deaths of several characters. It was also a new idea for marriage at the time: As a way to separate themselves from immigrants with typically large families, many Americans came to believe small families were superior.

Illustrative Moment The final scene takes place during and after a large, fancy wedding. The conflict unfolds when the wife is tempted by another man. While she has planned to run away with him, she overhears a violinist playing *Home! Sweet Home!* and remembers the same thing happening on her wedding day. Remembering her joy and duty in her marital vows, she refuses to leave with the tempter and goes on to have a happy marriage as represented by a very short scene at the end of the segment showing the couple with three children in the future.



PSYCHOLOGY

Grief Grief arises several times in the film. We see it several times from Payne's mother, first when he leaves, next when she sees how he lives in the city, and finally when he dies. Grief may be what causes Payne's sweetheart to die. Apple Pie Mary experiences great despair when Robert sends her a letter saying he is leaving her to go back East. The mother is stricken with such grief that she nearly commits suicide. The emotion is portrayed as a reasonable response to painful events that can sometimes be taken too far.

Illustrative Moment The strongest moment of grief in the film happens when the mother returns home and finds her boys dead by each other's hands. Having raised such a monster and having nothing else to tie her to this world, she finds a knife and attempts to stab herself in the heart. The dull lad disarms her, and the mother continues grieving, pressing her face to his chest. Her grief is relieved somewhat when the dull lad offers to be her son.



Guilt There's only a few moments of obvious guilt in the film, but they come at important moments in the plot. We see Payne's guilt when his mother scolds him for his 'worldly' behavior. It spurs him to vow to change. While love is the driving force behind Robert's return to Mary, guilt over sending her the rejection letter and choosing the "worldly" Eastern woman causes him to rush back to her. The wife's guilt steels her to be able to resist temptation.

Illustrative Moment In the final chapter, we see a wife tempted by the advances of another man. It's implied they planned to run away together while the husband was at the club. While she does deny the other man's advances, there is a playful coyness to them. It's part of their love game. However, when she hears the violinist playing *Home! Sweet Home!* in the next apartment over, she remembers the same thing from her wedding day. Guilt over the betrayal of her vows turns her denials from playful to serious. She tells the tempter to leave before rousing and spending some time with her sleeping husband.



FLAWS

Greed This theme is small, but it is very important to one of the subplots in *Home, Sweet Home*. Greed plays a small part in Robert's rejection of Mary: To wed the woman from out East means access to her family's wealth and political power. However, he chooses love over his greedy desires. We see this theme exemplified in the story of the hateful brothers when a handful of coin creates a deadly scenario.

Illustrative Moment The hateful brothers are brought to a violent end because of greed. The elder brother is pleased to receive payment for a job he's done for a local man. The younger brother expects his brother to share, but the elder brother wishes to keep his earnings for himself. Angry at being shirked, and too greedy to consider emulating his brother by working for pay, the younger brother decides to rob and kill his brother. This ends in both their deaths when with his final effort, the elder brother grabs the gun and shoots his brother in vengeance.



Jealousy This theme only appears in the story of the hateful brothers. Greed fuels a jealous hate of the elder brother when the younger brother is denied a share of some money. The older brother too seems jealous of the younger brother because their mother dotes on the lazy man.

Illustrative Moment While the elder brother receives a wage from a local man for his labor, the younger brother plots to kill him, watching in the woods with a club. Further jealousy and a bit of logic lead the younger brother to change his plans. Instead, he confronts his brother with a gun at home alone, assuring a lack of witnesses and catching his brother off guard.



QUEST

Curiosity This theme only really appears in the story of the hateful brothers. The dull lad, perhaps curious about the younger brother's behavior, spies through the window of the little home. There, he sees the younger brother act out his plan of murdering his older brother with the revolver.

Illustrative Moment After witnessing the younger brother, the dull lad rushes off to find the sheriff. Although they arrive too late to stop the murder, the dull lad displays some curiosity once more, entering the home and finding the murder weapon under the watchful eye of the sheriff.



LIFE STAGES

Adulthood The theme of adulthood is very clear throughout the film. These major concerns of the characters are adult concerns such as marriage, earning money, social standing, and other common adult issues. What each of the characters does with their individual concerns tells us a moral tale.

Illustrative Moment Robert's story is perhaps the one most firmly planted in adulthood because he is a young adult. He has to define himself as an adult, and does so by choosing to head out West and seek a fortune. Here, he falls in love with Mary, but the sudden appearance of some friends from out East causes him doubt: They find her culture and appearance backward and mock Robert for adopting the local culture. Seeking approval and wealth, he at first agrees to a marriage his parents have arranged, but the song *Home! Sweet Home!* causes him to think of Mary, and he makes the decision to forsake wealth for love. The final scene in this chapter shows Mary and Robert raising a happy family.



PAST

Memory/Nostalgia This dual theme is the driving force of *Home, Sweet Home*. When the characters overhear the song *Home! Sweet Home!*, they are reminded of those they love and the place they call home. These memories are often steeped in nostalgia, and it's nostalgia that drives Payne to compose the verse. Similar nostalgia and memories strike each of the tempted or troubled characters in the other stories as well. In this element, we see that there have always been a "good old days" as long as there have been people. Our strongest memories are often those of love and joy, and that is what Griffith portrays in each chapter.

Illustrative Moment In the very first chapter, we see Payne at his lowest moment, trapped somewhere far from home after just getting out of debtor's prison. As each of his friends abandons him, he feels obvious despair, and in that moment, he thinks of home. We see his sweetheart and his mother having a friendly conversation on the steps of his childhood home. After thinking of this, he writes the famous verse that inspires all the other characters at some point in their stories.



ETHICS

Duty We see duty come up in varied forms throughout the film. Payne feels a duty to his mother and sweetheart to give up his worldly impulses. Robert is torn between his duty to his family and his love for Mary. The dull lad, emulating the Sheriff, sees it as his duty to inform the law when he oversees the younger brother plotting his murder. In the final story, the wife remembers her marital vows and wifely duties after hearing the song *Home! Sweet Home!* played by a musician next door.

Illustrative Moment In the story of the hateful brothers, the dull lad spies on the younger brother when he returns home early. There, he sees the man plot out a robbery and murder. Partially in a bid to become more like the sheriff he admires, the dull lad takes it upon himself to find the sheriff and steals a horse. Such lawbreaking is still a common theme when portraying duty in film today. Despite their best efforts, the lad and the sheriff arrive too late to stop the crime and the older brother's vengeance, but the dull lad still



takes some responsibility for arriving to late and tries to remedy the situation somewhat by promising to become the mother's new son if she'll have him.

APPEARANCE

Dishonesty This is a small theme that comes up in the first and final stories. The worldly woman who tempts Payne is dishonest from her first appearance. She seeks only to seduce him so that she may profit from his gifts and attention. When Payne really needs her, she abandons him like all of his other false friends. The cheating that the wife planned in the final story is a form of dishonesty. By remembering her marital vows, she is able to keep herself honest when faced with temptation. Griffith chose two sexual instances of dishonesty in which women were the main actors. This may say something about his worldview or a general view of women in the early 1900s.

Illustrative Moment The worldly woman enters the scene and immediately begins miming dishonest thoughts. She seeks to seduce the young writer into infatuation so that she can use him to gain wealth through gifts. When Payne returns from debtor's prison, all of his friends abandon her. He turns finally to the worldly woman, and she reacts just like the men, abandoning Payne.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways does *Home, Sweet Home* differ from modern films?
2. Which segment did you find most effective as a story?
3. Can you identify three examples of religious propaganda in *Home, Sweet Home*?
4. Did you notice anything unusual about the indoor scenes? What does this tell you about early film-making?